

Deadbeat Contractor Angers Yonkers Clients

by Tony Aiello

YONKERS (CBS) —

Homeowner Fred Buhler said his sense of dread built over a matter of months.

"I was worried, certainly," said Buhler, who last summer gave \$900 to a contractor as down payment on work to fix the roof and gutters on his garage.

"He said he would start in a matter of weeks," Buhler said. "Came into months, and I said 'something is wrong.' Finally, his telephone was disconnected."

The Yonkers Consumer Protection Bureau said contractor John Arceri was building ill will with a number of customers.

Buhler's neighbor, Georgina Garcia, gave Arceri more than \$35,000 to create a driveway and parking pad at her home.

"He took the money and basically ran," said Garcia.

A total of seven clients complained to the Yonkers CPB about Arceri, said director Kerry O'Brien.

"It's their hard-earned money, they paid for something, didn't get service. So it starts to border on fraud when people stop returning phone calls," said O'Brien.

Poor performance and failure to deliver services are common complaints about home improvement contractors in Westchester. In fact, the County says "home improvement and repair" topped the list of consumer complaints last year, ahead of "gas station issues" such as gouging and problems with "small retailers."

The problem is getting so serious, some municipalities are moving quickly to charge contractors with Grand Larceny if they take money and don't perform the work.

The threat of criminal charges helped convince John Arceri to do the right thing, according to O'Brien at the Yonkers CPB.

"This week he paid almost \$70,000 restitution to unhappy clients," O'Brien said.

Buhler was among those getting their money back.

"It feels good, and it feels also the right thing," Buhler said. "I'm glad this consumer agency was here to help."

To avoid problems, experts say you should always check to make sure a home improvement or repair contractor is properly licensed. Ask for references and demand a contract with firm start and finish dates.

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